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### **Effective Communication Practices during Organizational Transformation**

A Benchmarking Study of the U.S. Automobile Industry and U.S.  
Naval Aviation Enterprise

**July 2007**

by

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A report prepared for

## **U.S. Navy Sea Enterprise**

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# Effective Communication Practices during Organizational Transformation

## A Benchmarking Study of the Automobile Industry and the U.S. Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE)

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## Introduction

This study explores effective communication practices during organizational transformation, change, and turnarounds. The U.S. Navy, the sponsor of this study, has been engaged in Enterprise transformation efforts for several years, introducing changes to improve combat readiness, while simultaneously reducing costs and increasing efficiencies. Many of these changes call for shifts in the business side of the Navy. While the traditional hierarchical structure is necessary on the battlefield, the Navy seeks to change the business side of their military operation to a more collaborative, matrix-like structure that makes better use of the combined strengths of the organization.

Leadership and management communication have been consistently identified in management research as the foundation for creating and sustaining organizational changes<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, the Navy commissioned the Center for Defense Management Reform (CDMR) to conduct a research study that would provide insights into

effective communication practices during organizational change.

### Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a systematic process for learning from contexts outside an organization's usual frame of reference for the purpose of organizational improvement. In 2006, CDMR did a study to investigate the value of benchmarking for the Navy's Sea Enterprise initiative. We examined various types of benchmarking approaches, explored both private and public sector benchmarking candidates, and identified those most relevant to the Navy. Based on this report, the Navy asked us to benchmark communications for organizational change.

### The Department of Defense and the U.S. Auto Industry

Our approach to this study was to identify companies or organizations with enough organizational and management similarity to make

**Table 1. A comparison of the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Auto Industry**

Sector Dimensions	U.S. Auto Industry	U.S. Navy
<b>Size and Scope</b>		
Employees	718,000	705,000
Annual Revenues	\$419 billion (revenues)	\$127 billion (budget)
Assets	\$315 billion	\$447 billion
<b>Organization</b>		
Type	Hierarchical, centralized	Hierarchical, centralized
Procedures	Long standing, complex	Long standing, complex
Geography	Dispersed facilities/operations	Dispersed facilities/operations
Culture	Distinctive sub-units	Distinctive sub-units
<b>Environment</b>		
Internal forces	Rising costs, reduced revenue	Rising costs, constrained revenue
External forces	Changes in global marketplace	Changes in global threats
Public opinion	Direct impact on revenue	Direct impact through Congress
Public policy	Labor, safety & environmental laws	National security, foreign policy
<b>Change Management</b>		
Improved operations	Procurement, facilities, production	Procurement, facilities, processes
Lower employee costs	Manpower, healthcare, retirement	Manpower, healthcare, retirement
Restructuring goals	Return to profitability through company-wide restructuring	Future readiness & capability through enterprise-wide thinking
<b>Leadership</b>		
Frequent turnover	Promotions, retirement, restructuring	Promotions, retirement, elections
Sustaining change	Changing agendas	Changing agendas

them good candidates for benchmarking and a two-way exchange of best practices. The strong similarities between the Navy and U.S. auto companies indicate that they can serve as useful benchmarks (see Table 1). The Navy and the auto industry are similar in size and scope, they have comparable organizational structures and processes, and they face internal and external environmental challenges that are strikingly alike. Their change agendas are quite similar, and leaders in both are challenged to sustain their change agendas.

The Participants

Benchmarking research suggests that both external and internal benchmarking candidates provide useful information in evaluating best practices. For the external benchmark candidates, we examined four companies in the U.S. auto industry – GM, Ford, Chrysler, and Toyota. For our

internal candidates, we investigated Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE). NAE was formed in 2004 to implement the aviation components of the Navy’s future strategy, and to support the Navy’s efficiency-seeking business management goals. NAE functions as a partnership between multiple organizations within Naval Aviation, based on a corporate model of inter-organizational communication, alignment, and integration. NAE has been consistently identified as being one of the Navy’s most fully-developed Enterprise-wide organizations.

Within these organizations, we interviewed high level executives, senior managers, and managers (See Table 2).

Methods

In this benchmarking study, we were primarily interested in the perceptions of executives and senior managers who had lived through—and

Table 2. Characteristics of Study Participants

Typical Titles	U.S. Auto Industry	U.S. Navy
Executive Management		
	President Executive Vice President Senior Vice President Vice President	Vice Admiral Rear Admiral
Senior Management		
	Director National Manager Manager	Chief of Staff Program Executive Officer Public Affairs Officer
Management		
	Integration Engineer Program Specialist	Project Manager Program Analyst Executive Officer Department Head
Areas Represented	U.S. Auto Industry	U.S. Navy
	Corporate Operations Engineering and Manufacturing Communications	Naval Aviation Enterprise Air Speed Maintenance Communications



learned from—the many organizational changes they had experienced. Therefore, we were informed in this study by the philosophy of “grounded theory,” a method in which the research is grounded in the data itself and not driven by a preconceived management communication theory. The benefit of this methodological approach is that its primary aim is to understand the research situation, not necessarily to test a hypothesis.

To gather our data, we conducted 34 qualitative interviews, approximately one hour in length, using a semi-structured interview format. All identities of participants were kept confidential.

In the interviews, we used “Critical Incident Technique,” which is a method for eliciting stories or key incidents that illustrate effective or ineffective communication practices.

All the interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and coded for recurrent themes. These themes were then organized and are presented in

the results section of this report. For a more complete explanation and theoretical rationale of the methods, please see the Appendix, page 35.

## Findings

Thematically, our study resulted in three primary areas of focus for effective and ineffective communication practices during times of organizational change.

First, the section on qualities of leaders focuses on those leadership communication practices and behaviors that our participants shared as critical to leading any change effort in an organization.

Second, the section on delivery strategies focuses primarily on the styles, media, and audience awareness aspects of effectively delivering organizational change messages.

Finally, the section on cultural adaptation identifies key areas of culture and system changes that our participants deemed necessary

**Table 3. Findings and Recommendations**

Leadership Qualities	Delivery Strategies	Cultural Adaptations
<b>Articulate the plan</b> Be passionate about the change Make a compelling case Focus on results Measure outcomes	<b>Be honest and open</b> Tell the truth Make communication a priority Communicate face-to-face Walk the talk	<b>Give them what they want</b> Tailor rewards Use money when feasible Provide public recognition Encourage pride in work Improve the quality of life
<b>Work the plan</b> Drive change deeply Understand the work involved Solicit feedback Walk the walk	<b>Cut to the chase</b> Build a shared understanding Be clear Be consistent Repeat yourself Be concrete Use data persuasively Be transparent Be prompt	<b>Overcome resistance</b> Replace personnel Persevere Demonstrate the benefits Appeal to self-interest Encourage rule-breaking
<b>Be a genuine team player</b> Trust & support your people Mold consensus Share credit Be visible Heed communications experts	<b>Adapt your message</b> Focus on internal messaging Communicate to all levels Know your audience What’s in it for me?	<b>Be resourceful</b> Engage leadership Engage employees Give ownership Work from the bottom up Provide training Use outside expertise
<b>Face bad news</b> Deal with the reality Use urgency as a motivator Support problem solving		<b>Accept change as a way of life</b> Be patient Celebrate & repeat successes

to align the organization with the changes being proposed.

In all cases—whether we are discussing qualities, behaviors, or system adjustments—we are guided by the premise that all the recommendations be viewed as communicative acts that impact perceptions and attitudes.

### **Communication, management, leadership, or all three?**

The focus of this study is communication, based on the premise that all behaviors and attitudes are *perceived* by—and therefore *communicated* to—members of the organization. So, for example, in one section we discuss “leadership qualities,” but with the understanding that we are primarily focused on how those qualities emerge through leader communication. In one case, for instance, a good leadership quality reported by participants was a willingness to hear bad news. In our examples of leaders who exhibit this quality, we relay the various ways they encourage bad

news—that is, how they *communicate* their willingness to hear it—as the primary finding. In short, we are concerned in this study with leadership and management qualities in terms of how they are communicated through words and/or actions. Regardless of whether one possesses such qualities, it is only through communicating that they will have an effect on organizational members.

### **A collection of experienced voices**

This study sought to capture the expertise and experience of participants primarily in their own words. As a result, the report is largely based on direct quotations from those we interviewed. While the summary of findings table (Table 3) illustrates the key themes that emerged from our data, the richness of this study comes from the words of the participants.

In short, we sought to preserve the words of our participants because the nuance of their perspectives can often only be gained through how they specifically express their ideas.

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## Leadership Qualities

In any change effort, our participants say, it is critical that the organization have leaders that manage and shepherd the transformation through the organization. Current change research suggests that defining the change focus, guiding the change effort, and facilitating organizational participation are all important leader activities<sup>1</sup>. More specifically, however, the leaders that we spoke to emphasized the following key leadership elements in any change effort:

- Articulate the plan
- Work the plan
- Be a genuine team player
- Face bad news

The leaders we spoke to emphasized what they saw as critical leadership qualities in managing organizational transformation.

### Articulate the plan

“[Good leaders] are able to see a system that isn’t working, envision a system that can work, and articulate a vision for that.”

Moving from chaos to concept is a challenge, but change leaders must have the ability to articulate a plan for moving forward. Successful articulation means that leaders demonstrate passion for the idea, make their case in a compelling way, understand the need to focus on results, and insist on measuring outcomes.

### Be passionate about the change

“It has to begin with a leader who is absolutely passionate about what he or she is doing. [They have] to have a clear vision about the future state, and then must work tirelessly to personally communicate that future state.”

Leaders have to believe in and be passionate about what they’re advocating. Participants noted that organizational members know the difference between someone who really believes in a change versus someone who is simply going through the motions. As one senior manager put it, “You need

leadership from the top. You need that strong commitment and not just the words.”

One clear benefit to a leader’s passion is that people are more apt to get on board with the plan: “They want to see your commitment. If you’re committed to it, then you’re going to have an easier time getting me to become committed to it ... you can force compliance, [but] what you want is commitment.”

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*“Make sure you pick the right leadership to lead that change”*

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Different leaders will have different styles of demonstrating passion for their ideas. One leader described his behaviors this way: “I’m pretty relentless about stuff when I get on it, and I’m a bit like a pit bull: I don’t let go. So, when you talk about making change like this, there has to be a constant role of, ‘Hey, I’m not forgetting about this. I’m not letting go of it until we are where we need to be.’”

### Make a compelling case

“So, it was hard at first but once you got them to see the tools, to use the tools... I mean, it worked.”

Once you have articulated the plan, the next step is to make a compelling case to others. Part of making that case is a leader’s ability to demonstrate the value to all the stakeholders in the organization. Even before a full roll-out of a plan, one strategy for making the case is to do a prototype or a demonstration project: One leader explained, “Theory doesn’t prove it to a lot of people ... You actually have to show why you need to do this, and it has to come out of a real prototype. ‘If we do this, this is what we get.’”

Besides demonstrating that it works, there are other ways to make the case. Research, past experience, and clear knowledge of the market

can all play a role. But the critical issue is that leaders clearly make the case in a way that is persuasive. When asked why a particular auto leader was successful in his turnaround efforts, one executive said simply: “He’s very straight forward. He makes his case.”

### Focus on results

“There needs to be an obsession about performance of the result produced ... The output is what is important.”

Part of clearly articulating a plan, and compelling others to actually follow it, is to focus on results rather than process. Sometimes, participants noted, a process focus can masquerade as effective change implementation, but really obscure whether or not the organization is achieving real goals: “It’s real, real easy to get everybody to focus on strategies, like ‘Man, oh man. I’m working like heck on the strategies.’ But it’s not driving results.”

A focus on results is also important to help people to understand the relationship between their actions and particular outcomes. One auto executive said that understanding this relationship is key to organizational alignment: “You have to align your organization. People within your organization have to know that what they do impacts the bottom line, or the overall goal of the organization.”

Once people understand that relationship, sometimes a focus on results encourages higher performance. A senior manager shared that: “Everybody just did good enough because they thought good enough was okay; nobody had ever asked for more. And once somebody asked for more, we started getting more, almost immediately.”

As a leader draws on results to articulate the plan, the final component of a compelling case is an insistence on measuring outcomes.

### Measure outcomes

“Put very simply ... create a performance environment that ties everything to operational results.”

Good leaders create measures and metrics that tie behaviors to outcomes. “You need those good metrics in order to be able to measure those

things so that people can understand how what they do relates to those goals and objectives.”

First, participants noted, you need to understand what to measure—not always an easy task. Our participants stressed that change leaders need to push for the right measures.

One Navy officer illustrated the problems of a process focus and measuring the wrong things in assessing the effectiveness of Lean Six Sigma: “[One leader] wants us to tell how many black belts we have trained and how many green belts we have trained, [but] that isn’t really a good measurement. All you are going to do is drive people to get green belts and black belts. You really need to measure the results of what those black belts and green belts are giving.”

One auto executive illustrated the problem by comparing the cost difference between the salary of an American and an offshore engineer. While the initial costs may seem lower for the offshore engineer, it may be that the work takes longer because the offshore engineer doesn’t have the same skills and experience. So, he argued that a better measure was “how much it costs to do a product ... independent of labor [and other issues]. You’ve got to have a key measure because you could measure the wrong things.”

A focus on key measures was a common theme among participants. One auto industry executive offered this example: “It’s very important to take a look at a key efficiency measure ... We use what we call Strategic Units of Work (SUW), that’s how much it takes to do an engineering task ... And then we’ve got budget dollars. We simply go and divide the two, and what you do is you get Dollars/SUW.” Naval Aviation also attributes its success to a key measure: “Naval Aviation was successful ... and I feel really strongly about this ... because of a single, fleet-driven metric of Aircraft Ready for Tasking, at reduced cost.” Both of these examples illustrate the power of a key measure, one that everyone understands, in order to drive the business.

Key measures also prevent an organization from looking at too many measures: “[Good leaders] look for the key levers that allow you to achieve the cost objective. If you lay out a hundred measures, all hundred are not effective.

There are certain key measures in achieving where you want to go.”

However, before they can get good measurements, leaders need a good baseline of the or-

*Get “all the  
dirty laundry ...  
on the table”*

ganization. As one leader put it, “[You have to] have a much more detailed review of the key

facts of the business and a process that has the management team monitoring and looking at those [facts] on a very, very frequent basis, so that you’re always in touch with where the business is going ... if you’re on or off track against whatever your plan might happen to be.”

There were several ways participants shared for reporting outcomes to the organization. One strategy was having candid, management review meetings on a regular basis. While review meetings are standard practice in most organizations, our respondents stressed the need for brutal honesty and transparency: “One of the key things to the success of any program when you want this much change is transparency ... all the dirty laundry gets put on the table.”

This level of transparency also has the benefit of countering potential resistance. As one executive explained, “We do a business review every quarter, after we do our earnings statement. We go through all of the facts of the business and we share all the financials with everybody ... [and] you can’t argue with the facts.”

Once leaders have articulated a compelling, measurable plan, the next step is to fully execute that plan throughout the organization.

## Work the plan

“You can’t just think you are going to stop at the meeting and say, ‘Okay, now it is going to happen.’ You have to continue to push it down.”

Clearly it is not enough to articulate a plan—good leaders must also be capable of fully executing the plan and permeating the whole organiza-

tion. What this often means, participants say, is that leaders must be willing to drive change throughout the organization, take the time to understand what they’re asking the organization to do, solicit feedback along the way, make minor adjustments without changing course, and embody the changes in their own behaviors.

## Drive Change Deeply

“What I look for, frankly, is for people who try to drive change. To me that is the absolute, infallible measure of leadership.”

Executing the plan means that leaders drive the change message consistently and repetitively, even relentlessly. A respondent shared an example of a good change driver on his leadership team: “He doesn’t just administer global engineering—he is driving change in global engineering and he never lets up.”

Sometimes, good change drivers will personally shepherd a change through until it sticks. In one example, an auto industry executive was committed to eliminating faxes in the office and between dealers, and instead pushed people to use email and the company’s dealer website. These changes, he said, would increase efficiency and decrease costs. But he hit some resistance from dealers: “Dealers, traditionally, love to just fax stuff in and out. But why should I fax it to you when it’s on the ... website? It was kind of like tough love, but it got to the point where everyone was joking about it. I was so overboard that I’d walk by the fax machine several times a day just to make sure that no one was faxing anything.” He also shared that once the dealers understood the benefits of the changes, they adapted.

In driving change consistently, leaders also need to uncover obstacles and hold people accountable. One Navy leader was described this way: “He asked them, ‘What would make this work better? What is keeping us from doing this better?’ And he took their ideas and said, ‘Okay, that is what we are going to do.’ Then he held them to that ... ‘This is what you wanted. Now you have to follow this through.’”

In driving the change, however, leaders need to be clear that they understand what they’re asking people to do.

### Understand the work involved

“You may not have done it [what you’re asking for], but you better understand what it takes. If not, they just, flat out, are not going to follow you.”

When leaders drive change and execute the plan, they have to understand the changes they’re asking for. “What makes [leaders] so effective is how well they understand the nuts and bolts of what happens down on the shop floor. When we put the boots on the ground, the most effective part was when the sailors got to tell the admiral what they did with their AIRSpeed tools ... and he knew their work.”

Some leaders who work their way up in the organization will clearly understand the jobs of those who work for them. But some simply do their homework: “You need to do all due-diligence. Do the piloting correctly so you know what effect or impact it has on any given situation before you roll it out corporate-wide ... make the corrections so when you roll it out across the board, it’s more readily accepted.”

When leaders don’t thoroughly understand the feasibility of their changes, tough lessons can follow. As one leader said, “you don’t want the organization ripping at each other because the task you gave them is one they just can’t do.”

One way to ensure that leaders know the realities that exist within the organization is to solicit feedback.

### Solicit feedback

“You ask them for input ... Then what you see is they are much more apt to raise their hand in my staff meeting and say, ‘not so damn fast,’ as opposed to getting run over.”

Part of making sure that the organization doesn’t rip itself apart is for leaders to clearly understand the impact of their change. The feedback you get from inside the organization is invaluable, our respondents said, for understanding both constraints and opportunities that exist. One executive consistently encouraged employees to speak up about issues, telling them, “You people know what’s wrong and what needs to be fixed far better than we do at the top because you see the waste.”

But employees need to believe that their input is welcome. One executive used this strategy: “I gave them the forum. We met openly at least twice a week; I’d come in, and all the supervisors would come in and they could take all the shots they wanted.” Not only did he provide the forum, but he actively welcomed criticisms. Another executive shared that these kinds of forums fostered shared vision: “And we met pretty much daily, had discussions, debates, learned things together. In that process of learning together, we formed a very common, consistent, and bought-into view of the end state.”

### *Soliciting feedback*

- Invite employee emails and respond
- Interview employees on a regular basis
- Allow short meetings with executives
- Share lunch with employees periodically
- Introduce a Problem Solving Board
- Have open forums for candid feedback

There were other ideas shared about ways to solicit employee feedback. One executive stated that his company receives approximately 400 emails a month and that they take some action on all of them. Another executive noted the importance of regularly interviewing and polling employees on a variety of issues. Some auto industry leaders make it a habit to give periodic access to those from all levels of the organization for 10-minute meetings on a variety of topics, and still others made a practice of sitting with rank and file employees during lunch in the cafeteria. What all these methods have in common was a genuine desire for and valuing of employee input.

The benefit of this feedback, participants noted, was that employees tend to have good ideas and, many times, valid concerns. Additionally, when leaders respond to those concerns,



employees can be more motivated to speak up the next time.

For example, in Naval Aviation, one successful change leader noted the value of not only hearing the concerns of the folks on the shop

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*Leaders have to embody the change behaviors and attitudes in everything they do.*

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floor, but actively addressing them. He recalled that he took notes on their concerns and that they noticed: “as we went through our process improvements, I

incorporated as many of those things I felt were legitimate ... and I know they realized that as they got down the track.”

On the other hand, if you ask for input and ignore it, the motivation for changing behavior can drop dramatically: “We don’t want to have folks going, ‘Okay, I gave you these ideas. What happened to them? I’m still having a problem with this red tape. I’m still here late. You’re not helping me here. Therefore, [the changes] must not work.’” One manager shared that it’s often just important to listen: “Let them have input and be willing, if nothing else, to let them complain. Because, if you make the mistake of saying, ‘That’s it, I don’t give a shit, go away,’ they will go away, they may not come back.”

Valuable input can come from a variety of sources. One auto executive, for example, noted the need for creative versus solely quantitative input in the auto industry, stressing that the industry isn’t all about numbers: “You must pay attention and really respect [creative] opinions,” he said. “An automobile is not about transportation. It’s about styling, brand, emotion, pride of ownership ... the data people will not get you there.”

Sometimes in the course executing the change, various forms of input may lead to necessary adjustments in the plan. For example, one executive encouraged feedback to his plan, and he characterized new process improvements as

“not chiseled in stone [but] molded in clay. If we find that there is something we can do differently or better, then we will make an adjustment.” Part of this ability to accept helpful feedback means not being “too in love with your own plan” and leaving room for necessary adjustments along the way.

On the other hand, participants said, it’s important that leaders not abandon the plan altogether. Once a plan has been well articulated, then it needs to stay consistent; otherwise, the organization gets confused and change-weary. “You have to pick a horse and ride it. Once you have picked the horse, then you can get into a continual improvement mode. You can’t argue over which horse to ride forever—there may be only 5-10 percent performance difference between them. You have to pick the horse, get everybody on plan, [and] then you can improve the horse that you are riding.”

#### **Walk the walk**

“People will listen to the words but they’ll watch the person. If they feel like they’re getting manipulated, they’ll turn off quicker than you can shake a stick at them.”

Leaders who execute change plans need to behave consistent with what they’re promoting. This means, according to our participants, that leaders embody change behaviors and attitudes in everything they do.

One executive stressed the importance of attitude: “If you walk in with your shoulders slumped and ‘Woe is me,’ I’ll show you an organization that acts the same way.”

Instead, our respondents suggested, leaders need to demonstrate the attitudes they want to see in their organizations: “You have to set the example,” one senior manager said, “because they watch you. They watch you. And they will do what you do.”

Not only does this example need to be set in formal meetings and public arenas, but in everyday interactions as well. As one executive put it, “I use every opportunity, whether it is a town-hall meeting with 800 people, or a smaller meeting, or just an interaction in the hallway, to reinforce the behaviors that I’d like to see in the rest of the organization.”

Being an example is tough, participants said, because “the hardest thing to do as a manager is to maintain your own standards.” However, those who live and embody the principles of their own plan, even in small ways, inspire others in the organization: “If we don’t demonstrate the behaviors, there’s no credibility in terms of telling the organization that we need to change.”

At least two key admirals in Naval Aviation, for example, completed the same Lean Six Sigma training that they were promoting for the larger organization. As one Navy officer noted, “The admiral did his green belt project, which was a time-intensive thing, and that sent a great message.” On the other hand, if leadership doesn’t live their plan, the larger organization will pick up on it. One senior Navy civilian noted that “The first thing that they [the workforce] are going to look at is the top of the organization. “We hear you saying these things, but are you living them, are you going to support them or are they the latest fad?”

In order to be effective in working the plan, however, leaders need to be genuine team players.

### Be a genuine team player

“Whenever you try and change an organization, if you think as an individual you’re just going to go in there and start shooting like a cowboy and everybody’s going to listen to you, you’re dead wrong.”

Our participants noted that being a team player must move beyond platitudes: Leaders need to build trust and mold consensus, share credit, become visible throughout their organization, and strongly engage with the communications experts.

### Trust and support your people

“What’s really hard to do is get [leaders] to listen and to recognize that, yeah, these folks really do know what they’re doing.”

For our participants, being a genuine team player means creating the space for honest information exchange. There is a balance to strike between a leader’s need to direct change efforts and the need to solicit help. Our participants strongly

cautioned against “shooting like a cowboy” and emphasized that leaders need to trust, respect, and support the people who work for them.

First, participants said, that means choosing the right people for the job and then trusting their ability to do it. As one leader put it, “If you put someone in charge that you don’t completely trust, then why are you putting them in charge? I put my trust in those folks that I assigned to lead the change throughout the organization and they knew that.”

Beyond simply giving your team trust, our participants also asserted that leaders need to give them the necessary authority to get the job done. One successful change deployment champion in Naval Aviation put it this way: “If you’re going to call them a deployment champion, support them, and give them the ability to get things done. Support is like effective delegation; you can give me the assignment, give me the authority to do it, and hold me accountable and responsible for it. If you withhold any of those three, I’m going to fail and you set me up to do so.”

### Mold consensus

“By looking at facts, data, debating other people’s viewpoints, you collectively set the course.”

Part of balancing the leader’s direction and the team’s input is molding consensus without abdicating authority. One executive summed it up by saying: “As we debate things it will be a participatory process but not necessarily a democratic one.”

This balance can be tricky, participants said, but good leaders understand the need to simultaneously provide direction, draw on the collective wisdom of the group, and mold consensus throughout the organization: “that doesn’t mean you become a searcher for consensus, you have to be a molder of consensus, and then your management team has to be a molder of consensus with the rest of the organization.”

In hierarchical organizations, this level of collaboration can be difficult, but important: “Just because you’re carrying a rank doesn’t mean you’ve got the right answer. You may have had a lot of different experiences, you’ve got every right to weigh in and the ultimate decision is yours, but



that doesn't mean you've got everything right." Another respondent put it this way: "You better be willing to get off your high horse and go to the people who really do it. Don't get so caught up in the chain of command or other stuff that you don't listen."

#### Share credit

"Even if I come up with an idea, I don't tell anybody it's my idea. I give credit to somebody else."

When people give input, they gain ownership, which stimulates employee buy-in to the ideas. Because of this, participants said sharing credit for good ideas is both ethical and strategically beneficial.

One auto industry executive went so far as to seldom take credit for anything, reasoning that few things came solely from him and morale depended on shared acknowledgement and ownership: "Here inside the organization, if I come up with an idea, I'm not going to take credit for it. I'm going to give it to someone in the marketing department, someone in the distribution group, someone in the field organization; someone else is going to get credit for it because, if it comes from me, that's just me telling everyone what to do. That doesn't work. And I don't want it to work that way."

The idea of sharing credit may seem counterintuitive in organizations that are, by nature, competitive, but one Navy admiral suggested that the overemphasis on individual accomplishment is an attitude he felt needed to be eliminated: "We are taught in the Navy since the time we got in to optimize your activity at the expense of all others. We are taught that behavior. But I believe that ego, certainly a mature ego that only cares about self, must be eliminated and fired from the Navy. The Navy rewards that behavior even today."

#### Be visible

"People, especially in a large organization, respond to visible, emotional, and highly communicative leadership."

Genuine team players are highly visible and get down into the depths of the organization. Participants noted that being visible affects how leaders are perceived by the organization. One

## STORIES FROM THE TRENCHES

### Boots on the Ground

Naval Aviation leadership gets visible by getting their "Boots on the Ground." During these monthly visits, about 30 high ranking military officers and government civilians will tour different duty stations to get a firsthand look at how sailors are implementing Enterprise changes. These big brass visitors not only get to see what's working, but they hear about problems and can often solve them on the spot.

While the events themselves are noteworthy, there's one particular admiral who creates special connections with the sailors on the shop floor. After a sailor reports on his duty area, the visitors move on as a group to the next station, but the admiral may hang back, chatting with the sailor for a few more minutes. As a way to show his appreciation, the admiral will shake the sailor's hand. But in that handshake, the admiral palms a Navy gold coin, which he passes to the sailor—an exchange few see but the two of them.

During our research, we were fortunate enough to watch a few of these exchanges, observing the power of the connection between an admiral and an enlisted sailor. We caught up with one of those sailors following one of these exchanges, asking him what that coin meant for him. He said, beaming, "Pride. There's a lot of reasons to come to work—to serve my country, to do a good job—but it's also about the satisfaction that comes from knowing my work is recognized."

When we asked the admiral why he didn't make the recognition more public, he said simply: "I just think it's important that they know the boss appreciates their work."

Looks like a mission accomplished.

respondent put it this way: “[Leaders] have to remain visibly engaged the entire time. Don’t just say all right, go forth and do this ... You have to stay visible with it. Walk down to the floor level within industry. Whatever it is, they have to go down.”

Being visible is also critical for ensuring that the organization understands the vision or message of the change. For example, one senior auto industry executive shared that in attempting to get dealer buy-in, he had to go tell the story personally: “We set out to have regional dealer meetings, and we touched every dealer and general manager in every region. We did a several hour presentation where we told the story, a really great story that they could understand, and I think we really got them to buy in.”

Interacting with the organization often means long hours and heavy travel schedules. One auto executive estimated that he spent 60-70% of his time on the road visiting auto plants and dealers, and a Navy admiral noted that he spent upwards of 80% of his time traveling to push change through his organization. These efforts, however, are critical in creating personal connections throughout the Enterprise.

An auto executive told a story about creating such connections during a meeting at one of his plants in another country: “I went down a couple days early and played golf ... drank some beer, learned more about cricket than I ever wanted to know ... You just have to pay attention to that stuff.”

Another reason for getting down on the ground level, participants say, is to learn things first-hand that you can’t learn any other way. As one Navy officer put it, “I would go down to the ground floor, in the hanger bay smoke shack, and listen to the troops and see what they thought ... I’d walk up [and say] ‘Hey, what do you think of this AIRSpeed Stuff?’ They may not have seen me in one of the briefings. [They’d say] ‘Oh, this is pretty cool,’ or ‘You know, my boss doesn’t like it.’” Such casual conversations can be far more

effective to understanding how people are really perceiving the changes.

### Heed Communications Experts

“PR is the social conscience of your company or your organization and they have to have the leeway to tell the CEO, ‘This is bull. You can’t do this. This is how it’s going to play.’”

Given the importance of communication in any change effort, participants emphasized the role of public relations as particularly important to change leaders. One executive called PR the “social conscience” of the company, and another noted the increasing importance of “reputation management” for organizations. Public Relations is so important, one executive argued, that it needs to be a C-level position that would be called

the “Chief Reputation Officer.” He argued that this person should “have a seat at the table at the highest level.”

One part of managing a company’s reputation is managing its relationship to the media. Good leaders, our participants say, treat the media as part of

their team: “The good [leaders] don’t say, ‘Oh, God I hate the media, they’re evil.’ They’re [more likely to say], ‘I’ve got to work with the media, they’re a conduit to my audience, and I don’t necessarily have to like them all the time, but I respect what they do. I don’t treat them as an adversary.’”

Those who treat the media as adversaries do so at their peril, said one PR executive:

“[Previously] we didn’t want to be in the press. And what that resulted in was the company being loathed by the media because we were distant, we weren’t accessible, we were sitting there behind this wall [as] this unapproachable, inhuman enterprise.”

Creating and managing your team, as a committed team player, was a highly valued leadership quality according to our participants. Part of being a team player, however, is that your team will sometimes tell you bad news—our partici-

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*“Tell the King when he’s naked  
and [be] willing to have the  
guts to do that.”*

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pants stressed that good leaders need to be willing to hear it.

### Face bad news

“Tell the King when he’s naked and [be] willing to have the guts to do that.”

Part of being a leader, in the view of our participants, is the willingness to deal with bad news, understand the urgencies that result, use those urgencies to motivate the organization, and commit to solving problems as they come up.

### Deal with reality

“You have to recognize the reality of the situation that you’re facing.”

In a changing environment, not all the news is going to be good. What we found in our interviews was that good change leaders not only accepted bad news, but actively welcomed it. Consequently, good leaders were described as those who created environments where it was safe to tell the truth. As a manager put it, one influential leader in his organization was “creating a safe environment in which you can actually talk about things ... where people won’t feel afraid to bring forward bad news.”

While it still won’t always be easy for employees to be candid, our participants said that the leader can inspire people to take that risk knowing that their heads won’t be cut off in the process. This openness was noted as particularly important in hierarchical organizations and turnaround efforts, similar to that which the Navy is undergoing. That openness, participants say, can pay off: “I’m starting to see a willingness of people to say we’ve got a problem.”

### Use urgency as a motivator

“Bad news is okay here for one reason . . . [that is] in the context of a potentially bankrupt automobile company.”

Leaders who welcome bad news uncover urgencies—problems that are likely affecting organizational effectiveness. When a company is facing bankruptcy, for example, soliciting the truth can be important for a company’s survival. In government organizations, the crises may be different, but just as important. In both cases,

revealing the urgencies for what they are enable the organization to face them head on.

For example, one executive shared how candor was particularly encouraged in their management meetings: “I happen to think we’ve got a great leadership team ... it’s easy to get a bit centric, lining up with the boss rather than [saying], ‘Hey, here’s the way it really is.’ And I’m going to tell you what, in this room right here, we have some pretty candid discussions, and that’s important in this whole thing.”

When motivating people to change, it is important to be forthright about the reality of the situation. As one respondent said, “I’m pretty blunt with people in saying this mantra of ‘change or die’ because I basically told them, ‘Listen, there’s not going to be another one of me here in a year. There might not be a company in a year.’”

So, respondents said, employees need to understand the true picture of the situation and why

the changes are necessary: “We have to make these changes or we will not survive as an enterprise. We will not survive, we will not be successful, we will not be meeting the needs of our employees, our customer, our shareholders. So, we don’t have a choice.”

Balanced with that fear, however, the organization also needs to deliver inspiration: “They’re really happy with the amount [of information] we’re giving them, but the more they know, the more frightened they are about the future ... you have to first really jolt people to get them to understand the seriousness of this and then balance it with some hope.”

Part of the way to get at that hope is through emotional appeals: “You have to get people emotionally engaged, involved and wanting to take the trip. It’s difficult, it’s hard, and it’s painful. [So], get them charged up and emotionally engaged in what you’re trying to do [because] it’s hard to do it coldly, analytically, rationally.”

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*Balance  
seriousness and  
urgency with  
hope and  
inspiration*

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Laying bare the reality of the situation enables leaders to see the problems more clearly.

### Support problem solving

“If any issues came up in the plants, they could be resolved at the meeting at a high level.”

In a change culture, problems not only need to be raised and understood, but solved. As one Navy participant advised, “The best thing that the Enterprise could do is advertise all the tools that they offer to everyone in order to make them successful ... If you have an issue, bring it up. We are here to help. That should be their slogan: ‘We are here to help.’ Who’s going to turn down help?”

Both the Navy and the auto companies provided examples of how they offered on-the-spot help. One senior manager said he consistently pushed people to identify their needs: “We had weekly meetings, and we would literally call people right there in that meeting and, with everybody sitting in the room we’d say, ‘Tell us what you need.’”

By forcing problems to the forefront, they can be addressed. Sometimes, the employees themselves are in the best position to fix things, provided that they get support to do so from management.

In one example, there was a particular part—a braided sock that allowed another part to be put in a car more easily—that was pulled from the auto assembly line because each sock was costing \$3 per car. The engineers objected to its removal, but the cost was too big of an issue. So, they proposed an alternative: “They came up with an idea of using a portable sock ... they put it on the harness to do the job, and then you take it off and recycle it. We saved \$3 a car. So, it started as a flat out ‘no,’ but the employees wouldn’t let go—they kept pushing, and in the end we got an answer that was good for everybody.”

A commitment to solving problems doesn’t mean an endless toleration for pervasive or repeated mistakes or challenges. One leader shared his philosophy: “If they don’t produce on the plan, then you can have a conversation. ‘Okay, what happened? Did you run into this problem? What

was the matter? How can I help?’ After about three go-rounds of this ... then fire them.”

## Delivery Strategies

At the heart of any change effort is the effectiveness of the message. In our interviews, participants described a variety of message delivery strategies that helped or hindered their efforts at organizational transformation:

- Be honest and open
- Cut to the chase
- Adapt your message

### Be honest and open

“We just said, ‘All right guys. We made a mistake. We hired a company that didn’t do what they told us they were going to do. We got rid of them. And we’ve heard you. Here’s the things that you said we should be doing, and we’re going to switch back to those things.’”

In communicating change efforts, it’s important for organizations to tell the truth, even the ugly side, about the current situation. However, there are good and bad ways to be honest—to have the best impact on people, it’s important to pay attention to how you communicate, to recognize the importance of face-to-face interactions, and to make sure what you communicate has integrity.

### Tell the truth

The importance of telling the truth came up repeatedly from our respondents, especially in turnaround efforts. One hurdle companies face is change fatigue, one executive said, and that’s something his company had to face head on: “first off you just have to acknowledge it to the organization: ‘I know there’s been lots of strategies around here.’ By acknowledging it you say ‘we get it.’”

Another respondent shared that telling the truth was critical in his turnaround efforts. He said that once everybody understood the expectation, “I could look them in the eye and say ‘this thing isn’t worth a damn,’” which allowed him to fix problems quickly.

Employees tend not only to expect the truth, but they also appreciate it. One senior manager recounted that “the feedback that we got from this last meeting was extremely positive about the facts that we showed, the way we communicated, the openness, and the candor.” One executive said that it goes beyond appreciation: employees demand it: “You have to be totally and blatantly honest. There is no room in today’s world for [lying] ... They’ll find out if you’re lying. Your inside and outside constituents accept nothing less.”

It’s clear from our respondents that it’s not enough to lay out brutal facts, you’ve got to pay attention to how you communicate them.

#### Make communication a priority

“He understood very early the importance of communication. He does it through one-on-ones, small group meetings, large management meetings, and communicating on all sorts of things.”

One of the important issues in being open and honest with employees is an awareness that communication matters. One executive was so clear on this point that he saw communication as absolutely fundamental to his job: “To be quite honest, I could put it very simply and say 100% of my time is communicating because everything that I do and say somebody’s looking at.”

Change leaders at all levels need to be aware of what they’re communicating by both words and actions. For example, one respondent shared, “[Some people] are capable of carrying on a conversation and reading their Blackberry ... [but] if you are the person sitting across from them, the signal you’re getting is ‘I am not very important.’”

Effective change leaders communicate well both by what they say and do: “There are some people who have the ability to show that they are sincere and that they care about communications. That they are interested.”

One lesson that our respondents learned in over the course of many change efforts was the power of face-to-face interaction.

#### Communicate face-to-face

“Regardless of all the technology and all of the other stuff—the e-mails and the e-newsletters and the blogs and everything else

that gets identified as a way of communicating with your workforce—for creating change, the most effective way is face-to-face: it’s more credible, it’s more in-depth, it’s more informative, it’s more likely to be listened to, they’re more attentive to it, and they receive the message much better.”

Face-to-face communication can be especially important when there are organizational changes in play.

In many cases, face-to-face interactions were simply more productive than other forms of communication. One executive described himself as “a big student of body language,” and therefore found personal contact to be instructive: “if somebody’s sitting [in a certain way], you know you’re not getting real buy-in ... in those one-on-ones, you can ferret out pretty quickly whether someone is walking the walk or just giving you lip service.”

Another respondent said that only through face-to-face communication can you “really hear what they are saying. Body language is sometimes clearer than the written word.”

#### Benefits of Face-to-Face Communication

- More credible
- More in-depth
- More informative
- Grabs attention
- More persuasive
- More revealing
- Clearer
- Greater feedback
- Better connection

In one example, a participant said that face-to-face interaction can be persuasive: “I used to be famous for my walk-and-talk. With certain people that you want to sway, you deal with them personally ... a lot of things can get done if you’re trying to address things like that.” His example is common among several that illustrated how people simply respond better to personal, face-to-face interaction.



Participants also said that leaders especially need to communicate in person during times of sweeping organizational transformation: “I am not talking about emailing and phone conferences, I am talking about face-to-face [communication] to help pull the organization through this. Whoever the key leaders are, they have to have a lot of eyeball-to-eyeball interaction with the people around the world.”

Additionally, leaders and managers need to recognize the power of one-on-one interaction in the daily course of introducing changes. In one case, a company was offering buyouts to employees, but not getting much response. In one study the company conducted, they found that “people who got a face-to-face chat with either their manager or a financial planner were much more likely, by a significant amount” to take the buyout because they were able to ask questions, share fears, and get feedback.

Importantly, according to respondents, one-to-many presentations don’t substitute for more personal interaction. One executive was having a hard time helping dealers understand the value of a new change initiative, even though the company had given several large presentations on the issue. He took a different course of action with one of the regional dealer leaders: “I fly to Minnesota, sit down with him and go through what [the change] is all about. Halfway through the conversation he goes, ‘Wow. I get it now. The light bulb just went off.’”

In describing why face-to-face is so much more powerful, one executive said simply: “face-to-face makes it real and allows people to start dealing with [the changes].”

Regardless of the medium, however, communication has to be authentic.

#### Walk the talk

“The most major problem that you ever have is when the reality doesn’t match up with the communication and the hype.”

In order for open and honest communication to have an effect, messages must be aligned with what the organization is actually doing because people are extremely perceptive: “They [one organization] thought they were smart enough to

communicate one thing and do something entirely different. That only lasts for a very short period of time before people find you out.”

In one example, an organization experienced a credibility hit because they tried to communicate too much, too soon: “They tried to go out very quickly and target everybody, ‘Here’s what it’s all about.’ At the same time, they were changing things and, therefore, were perceived as being dishonest—which wasn’t true, but they were so

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*“You have to be totally  
and blatantly honest ...  
Your inside and outside  
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continually changing that they lost credibility.”

One person described it as message integrity: “You have to just keep hammering an elevator speech, [but] you have to make sure the elevator speech has some integrity to it.”

One of the ways to build that integrity was ensuring that the communication matched the actions: “It has to be a deeds and words. Not or. It has to be both.”

Our participants said that employees in organizations watch what people do more than what they say. One Navy officer shared his experience: “It sent a huge signal to me and my command when the Navy invested money to send professional consultants to my site ... I am sure that these guys are not cheap, but they are smart, they are professional, they know what they are talking about, they have a good rapport with my troops. That told me, ‘we are serious about this.’”

One positive consequence of matching “deeds with words” is that employees begin to perceive individual people as credible. This is important, participants said, in order for change agents to have influence in the organization: “You better build credibility with them. When you tell them you can do something, [make sure] that you in-

deed can do it because once you lose that credibility, getting it back is almost impossible.”

Once you have credible people within the organization, they can work effectively to help others be more open to changes: “A lot of [overcoming resistance] is who you bring to the table ... make sure those folks are the voices that [employees] are hearing and that they don’t feel like they’re being sold a product.”

Being honest and open in communication, and paying attention to how the message gets communicated, were both important aspects to communicating changes within organizations.

Another issue that participants touched on was the need to be clear, to get to the point in a way that audiences can truly understand.

### Cut to the chase

“I feel like I’m in the kindergarten class where the teacher puts everybody in a single file line, and I whisper it in the ear of the first person. And that person has to tell the next person, and it goes down the line. And the kid at the end of the line has to say what the teacher says, and it comes out completely different than it started.”

Participants widely agreed that messages needed to be highly accessible to audiences, particularly when communicating changes. Specifically, it is critical to build understanding and persuade others by providing and repeating simple, concise, and consistent messages that use concrete, transparent data. Additionally, participants cautioned that messages need to be delivered promptly.

### Build a shared understanding

“Communication is education. Not just getting the word out, but making sure people understand what it is all about.”

According to participants, one mistake people make is assuming the employees’ level of understanding matches that of the change leader’s: “Often times we think, ‘well I understand it, so everyone understands it.’ [But] the reason why everyone is asking ‘what is the plan?’ is because they don’t understand it. I don’t care how much you believe you have done a great job of articulat-

## STORIES FROM THE TRENCHES

### The Problem Solving Board

An auto industry engineering group had an idea for changing “the culture in management from one of command and control to coaching, guiding, assisting, and removing roadblocks.” They came up with the “Problem Solving Board,” a whiteboard on wheels on the shop floor. They invited employees to write down problems and assign someone themselves to be responsible for correcting the issue. It didn’t take long for employees to see problems begin to go away and realize that they had a true voice in the workplace.

“The problem solving board broke the whole thing open,” one executive said. “When we did that, and gave people a voice and a chance to write down what the issue was ... They went from being anonymous to putting up a problem, putting their name on it and why they asked for it, and assigning someone themselves who had the responsibility to correct it ... and then watching people follow up and seeing problems go away.”

Giving employees this kind of voice has made a huge difference in how problems got solved. Now, using a relatively simple yet powerful method, employees had a way to take action.

In one case, some hourly guys found that some parts didn’t work together well, and they put the problem up on the board with an engineer’s name attached to it. “The engineer got all flustered” about the problem, the executive explained, “and the [hourly] guy says, ‘Well, here, you try it. Show me how to do this.’” In that moment, the engineer really understood the problem firsthand, and the organization as a whole began to realize what it meant to empower employees to speak up.

The executive said the employees needed to be engaged in the solution: “When they took ownership, that changed everything.”

ing it. If everyone is feeding back to you that you haven't, then you haven't."

To cope with that challenge, one respondent shared that she always had to remember "the journey that I had to go on to understand something. I had no idea why 'cost-measured readiness' was important. I can never assume that my audience member will know that."

One way to build shared understanding is to be as clear as possible.

#### Be clear

"You have to have a vision, but you have to have clarity around that vision."

To get clarity, messages need to be simple. One respondent shared that simplicity was key to one leaders getting buy-in: "He made things simpler. He made it very easy to understand what was going on." Changes may seem complicated, but change messages shouldn't be: "[The message] can't be a one or two page document that's dense."

Change agents who can refine their messages are simply more effective communicators: "He's starting to articulate the vision. It's very simple. It's 4 steps. And he's got a nice little graphic that helps him explain that." By keeping the vision simple, he explained, people can get their heads around it.

Another quality of clear messages is that they are concise. One participant said simply, "One thing we know when we are announcing change, we have to be really concise."

It's tempting to think that more detail generates more understanding. However, in the experience of our participants, too much detail prevents people from getting what the change is all about. Often, leaders need to be pushed, hard in some cases, to make their change messages more digestible. One participant shared his experience in pushing leaders to streamline the focus for the company: "There were, like, 28 things [to focus on]. All these senior leaders said [those things] were all core to turning the company around. Most people can't remember what they had for lunch today let alone 28 things they're supposed to focus on. I needed to get us down to two or three things that are memorable and stick with them for a while."

People have short attention spans, and many of our communications managers clearly understood the constraints of that: "When I communicate something on paper or PowerPoint brief, I only have their attention for three sentences, three slides."

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*"You have to be  
crystal clear on the  
benefits of the change"*

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Understanding that attention span means making significant adjustments in communicating the messages. One example related to PowerPoint slides: "Over the past year, we have simplified the key slides a great deal; they're down to eight from a 52-slide deck [and have] much better take-away levels and communication with employees."

Another participant noted how his organization was using shorter email messages: "I always love the emails that are a page and a half long, and they wonder why people didn't get the message." One company realized it had to revamp its project management process to make it more concise: "We had project management bullets up on every wall in the first plant we did. There were, like, 1400 elements to get this thing done. And I said, 'That's crazy.'"

Making things concise, while challenging, is critical. The next step, participants say, is to beat the drum consistently with those messages.

#### Be consistent

"Another priority is consistency because if you're bouncing around all over the place and changing, it confuses the organization."

Variation on message confuses people, and many of our respondents said that change efforts must strive for consistency. Basically, one participant said, "You have to have one message and it has to be the same to everybody."

In some cases, that means being consistent from one day to the next: "You have to be consistent in the elements that you're talking



about. You have to leave yourself some flexibility in case the environment changes, but you can't lose the construct or the framework of what your strategy is."

In other cases, it means striving to get and maintain consistency across groups: "You need consistency between the different groups ... what I've worked on here is getting a lot of people in a room together to say, 'What's the common vision here?'"

Additionally, participants said, internal and external messages need to be consistent: "The messaging internally and externally needs to dovetail. You certainly don't want to say one thing externally and another thing internally."

Consistency is difficult, our respondents said, especially in large organizations. One participant asserted that he didn't see "any organization doing a good job" of it. But several participants noted that it is a priority for them: "We have been working the past year on more consistent communication from the respective engineering leaders around the world."

Closely related to consistency is the need for repetition.

#### Repeat yourself

"Communicate, communicate, communicate ... give the same speech over and over and over and over again until you're blue in the face."

It takes repetition for messages to sink in. Have patience, participants said, "It might take a little while... the first speech isn't going to do it."

The second speech probably won't do it either, and participants offered this advice: "People need to hear it more than once, and every once in a while you've got to remind them of why you're doing it."

Another suggested that "Repetition of message is a key; you can't just say it once and assume everybody got it."

One of the challenges faced by our respondents is the tendency to move too quickly off message and onto another: "Tell them and tell them and tell them again ... We get tired of these messages and we want to move on. We are very quick to jump off of message or issue because

something else comes in to us ... [but] other people aren't dealing with it as quickly as we are."

Another respondent cautioned that "It isn't like you broadcast a change point one day and then you're done with it." One senior manager offered his belief that one can never repeat a message too much: "You can't over communicate. To me, over communication means they've agreed to do whatever you want to do."

Part of cutting to the chase on change messages means talking about things in concrete rather than ambiguous terms.

#### Be concrete

"As a leader, give clear directives to your people. Don't be wishy-washy."

Vision language tends toward the abstract, and participants stressed that change messages instead need to be very concrete. For example, Naval Aviation attributes much of their success to driving toward one concrete metric: "Using a single fleet-driven metric throughout the Naval Aviation enterprise was extremely important in describing the enterprise-wide change."

But getting concrete isn't easy, a challenge that many of our respondents had experienced in their own organizations. One Navy participant described his situation early on in the change effort: "We didn't have any clear, identifiable objectives that cascaded down from senior leadership down through the organization."

One strategy for getting concrete is to ask specific questions: "It became very clear that the transformation stuff was not getting communicated very well. How were people expected to make transformation because of a speech about reducing the cost of readiness or being more agile? It is a very conceptual idea. One of the things that I pushed for was the specifics. How do I reduce the cost of aviation? What are the tools? So everything I wrote was focused on how someone at the deck plate was supposed to take this giant concept and apply it in their every day working environment."

In addition to being concrete in the general vision, it's also important for change leaders at all levels to be clear about their specific expectations: "It's very important when you're trying to

change an organization that you communicate your priorities. If you don't do that, then the organization is trying to figure out who this person is, what their agenda is, and you lose a tremendous amount of time on that."

Several participants had to learn this the hard way, but shared their experience for getting more concrete about expectations: "We sat down at the beginning of the year as a team, and we went through what the objectives were for the program. And they were very clear. There was no misunderstanding where anybody stood."

One important way to get more concrete is through using data, in compelling ways, that make sense to the audience.

### Use data persuasively

"Where we've made some progress is just with hard-core data."

Data, used well, can be extremely persuasive. One participant shared how he used data to overcome resistance: "there's a lot of resistance to [a new initiative] in the traditional markets. Where we've made some progress is just with hard-core data. We've got global surveys now on customer usage of cars ... Objectively presented data is usually the best. Arguments just aren't very persuasive otherwise."

Another respondent shared a specific example of how data overcame initial resistance to changes in employee healthcare. In the auto industry, one executive explained, employees have some of the best healthcare benefits in corporate America. So, when times got tough, healthcare was an area that needed to be addressed. Understandably, employees resisted these changes, but data helped them understand the reasoning: "We were honest with them; we showed them the cost of healthcare [for the company], what it's like for the average American, and how it's most important that we keep this company competitive."

This example and others demonstrate that sometimes employees resist changes simply because they don't understand the full impact on the organization. Data can really help bridge that gap: "Usually there's an assumption when they ask for things that they're an easy thing to incorporate. But when you come back and explain what the costs and tradeoffs are, clearly and ob-

jectively, and you show competitive data, usually that's enough."

One benefit of using concrete data to communicate changes is that it creates a clear picture of the change effort. That picture, participants say, provides a transparent view of what the change is about.

### Be transparent

"The best advice for Sea Enterprise is to be as transparent as possible."

One component of cutting to the chase is to be transparent—to show the change or transformation in terms of "how everything fits] together, graphically displayed, in the organization."

This issue of transparency, participants said, was important for gaining buy-in:

"The best advice for SEA Enterprise is to be as transparent as possible. The point of contacts, how is the enterprise structured, where to go for information. That can all be housed on a secure website. There is no reason that this information should be hidden from your customers, and I think people forget that the deck plate sailor is our customer. We can't do anything without him."

In addition to making messages transparent and clear, it's also important to get the messages out promptly.

### Be prompt

"Communication is a priority, and you don't want to wait until the change is upon you to start communication."

The general consensus was that communicating promptly is advisable. As one respondent said, "People know things will change, but you can't wait for a perfect game plan in three months when a good one is available now and people can just get started," and another cautioned, "Don't wait until you're in a crisis mode to start communicating."

One executive noted that his company had weekly meetings, but that they "try not to wait for those meetings and [instead] communicate when things come out."

In some cases, publicly traded companies are prevented by law from releasing certain informa-

tion early because of how it may affect the stock market. However, within those constraints, several auto industry participants shared that they strive for prompt communication about company issues.

One executive explained, “Nothing is worse than sitting at home at night when the news comes on and says something about what’s happening [in your company], and your spouse looks at you and says, ‘Did you know that?’ and you go, ‘No.’ Nothing’s worse than looking [bad] at home.”

The bottom line, however, may simply be flexibility: “Your communication set-up has to be very flexible to respond to what’s happening in the world today. People expect instant communications.”

Getting clear communication about the change effort is crucial to ensuring that people understand the vision. But general clarity isn’t always enough—messages will also need to be adapted for different audiences.

### Adapt your message

“I think you have to know who your stakeholders are. It’s not just one group. It’s multiple groups.”

Knowing who to target, and how to target them, is a constant challenge in communicating change messages. But there was wide consensus that you have to pay close attention to internal audiences, communicate through all levels, know the specific needs of particular audiences, listen to feedback, and understand the impact the changes will have on your audiences.

#### Focus on internal messaging

“The internal constituents are hugely important. You’re not going to win if they don’t believe.”

While external audiences are important in change or turnaround efforts, many of our respondents said that it’s the internal messages that matter most. As one executive looked back on how his company learned that lesson, he shared that “the primary need then and today needs to be more internal than external.” In one case, a company hired a consultant group to assess the organization’s needs: “They went

through here, charged a great deal of money, and what they recommended and ultimately put in place was a very robust, people-intensive delivery mechanism that focused on internal communication.”

In Naval Aviation, they also learned the lesson to focus internally early on: “We decided a long time ago that our initial focus needed to be an internal audience. We needed to make people in the fleet, in the Navy, in Naval Aviation, understand what we are doing, what we are trying to accomplish, and get them onboard with this culture change.”

It’s also important to communicate to all levels of your internal audience.

#### Communicate to all levels

“You have to get the message to them ... through all levels of the organization.”

According to participants, change leaders can’t just focus their efforts on one or two levels of the organization, but instead need to adapt the message to all levels: “You can’t just assume that because you told the second layer and the fourth layer that the other folks are going to get it. I think that the leader of the organization is responsible for making sure that it gets communicated through the entire organization.”

One of the challenges to getting the message out, however, is targeting the messages appropriately at different levels: “I think you have the guy at the top who somehow has to find the guy at the lower middle, not the guy on the front line. Don’t talk to that guy. He is more worried about his car payment than he is about taking Lean [Six Sigma] classes.” Respondents suggested that often the direct supervisor has a much better strategy for reaching the front line. As one senior manager put it, “they’ll listen [to the supervisor] because they’re used to him. They see him every day, and they trust him.”

Still, participants say, leaders do need to touch on the different levels to empower change agents throughout the organization. There are many ways to do this. In one example, an executive does what he calls “diagonal slices,” a term he used to describe targeting different levels within his organization: “I do diagonal slices with the organization on a monthly basis. It used to be

about 25 people at a time; we're expanding that now up to about 50 at a time. It's a very effective way to get the word out."

In another example, an executive used technology to reach the organization: We do a Webcast for 15 minutes every week ... I view it as the opportunity to reach a lot of people on a regular basis." During these Webcasts, he would give a 5-minute weekly update and then open things up to questions from the organization.

Still another executive held various regular meetings to ensure everyone was on board with the changes: We had staff meetings regularly. We had all-executive meetings, which is about 120 people regularly, so they knew what was going on. And then we had what were called 'leadership meetings,' which is our first-line supervisors and above, twice a year, just about 1100 people, so they knew what was going on here."

What all these examples have in common is a thorough commitment to constant communication throughout the enterprise. One executive, who also teaches human relations at a local university, shared his opinion: "I've taught Human Relations and Leadership, and I've said, 'If I had to name this class something else it would be Communication.' And that's what it is. I've got to [communicate] it up and down the organization, sideways, and find those folks who are the champions for it, who are going to spread it."

So how do you know when you're reaching everyone? One way is simply seeing the results. One respondent said that "If you're doing your job right, and you're communicating it, every level is effective all the way down to the plant level."

What's effective for reaching different levels of the organization? Participants say it's critical that you understand the particular worldviews of your various audiences.

#### Know your audience

"Every [communication] piece had to start off with 'why would someone be interested in reading this?'"

While the core message needs to be consistent, participants stressed that messages still need to be modified for different audiences. One

leader was described as being highly attentive audience needs: "He can move around in those levels of abstraction very quickly to deal with someone from marketing who's calling to ask a question about a very high-level aspect: 'Why can't we offer this package with that?' or 'What would it take to do this?' But, he can also make the connections back down to the details." One executive also emphasized the need to continu-

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*"You can force compliance, [but] what you want is commitment."*

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ally adapt to who he was speaking to: "There's the ability to say the same thing in different ways depending on how the person is going to receive it; the ability to be gentle and polite

when necessary, and to be firm when necessary."

There were several participants who commented specifically on adapting to younger audiences: "I am finding the younger folks communicate very differently than my generation does ... they have a different expectation for communication, they have their own language in many cases." In motivating this audience, change leaders need to understand these differences and adapt to them: "On the battlefield, you need command and control, and everybody needs to just do what they're told and believe in their supervisor. But that doesn't work with young people that are growing up today. You're not going to get the young people to come into your world and do everything you want to do."

In addition to adjusting to specific audiences, participants also provided advice for understanding audiences in general in a change environment. For example, one executive said certain words can trigger fear: "Don't ever use the word 'reorganization.' That scares the hell out of people." He stressed that it was important to pay attention to the words you use.

Another general piece of advice, offered up by a communications professional, was to accommodate different audiences even within the same messages: "The most important information goes up front. I realize that there are those people

who will go out and seek out more information, so I have to provide the details as well.”

Sometimes, though, it’s a question of targeting. As one participant stressed, “I think the expectations of leaders that everybody is going to know everything is too broad of a reach. The messages aren’t targeted enough.” Targeted messages are especially important, respondents said, when trying to reach the frontline. As one communications manager put it, “What wrench-turner cares about balancing current and future resources? He has no idea what that means.” Instead, she said, focus on what matters to them: “Every story I tried to write ... focused on how someone at the deck plate was supposed to take this giant concept and apply it in their every day work.”

Targeting is hard work, but essential if audiences are to clearly understand how the change relates to their world. Sometimes that means simplifying more complex ideas: “You need leaders who can take complex concepts and translate them down to tactical daily applications for people.” Unfortunately, this doesn’t always happen: “There are people in the middle who think the only thing they are required to do is take [an admiral’s] brief, put their name on top of it, spew out the four slides verbatim, and that’s it: Everyone is supposed to get it.” So, not only do change leaders need to adapt messages themselves to different audiences, they also need to hold their mid-level managers accountable for adapting those messages as well: “[Managers] need to translate the change into tactical daily applications for their workforce.”

One valuable way to adapt to different audiences is to tell stories they can relate to. As one executive said, “Figure out a way to tell a great story that will resonate with people. You’ve got to find the right words, and tell it in a story form so that it makes sense to them.” Another executive shared his success with reaching a group that had previously been resistant to the change message: “I think I told a good story. I think we went back and got things that the audience could relate to, so that it made sense to them. And, I didn’t just try to tell them the story myself. I used dealers to tell the story.”

Ultimately, however, most audiences will always ask the question: What’s in it for me?

### What’s in it for me?

“If people can’t see what it does for them, it isn’t going to last very long ... whether your boss is in favor of it or not.”

Clearly, one of the big questions in rolling out a change effort is how to get employees motivated to endorse and enact the changes. Our participants stated repeatedly the need to understand and communicate the impact on the employee: “That’s been an interesting question: how do we get [the change] instituted and how do we get buy-in from both management and employees? What are their values? We always have to answer that question: ‘What’s in it for me?’”

There were several suggestions about how to examine the impact on the employee. One participant noted the need to recognize the pain involved in change: “You have to show the vision [and] what it means to the different groups and people involved. And it has to be communicated clearly, with conviction and also with compassion that change is stressful, regardless of whether the end-state is better for the individual or not.” If they don’t see the benefits to them, participants noted, “then why are they going to go out on a limb?”

Employees who understand the personal benefits are more likely to make changes. One leader said he laid it out to his employees this way: “When we make these changes, it is going to mean that you can do things better and easier and you are going to be doing what you are trained to do. You are just going to spend more time fixing things. Less time chasing stuff down.” But talk isn’t enough, another participant said: “They need to see and feel a personal result ... we still live in this all-about-me world, whether we like it or not.”

In Naval Aviation, they’ve found that hard evidence and experiencing the benefits firsthand was what carried the day: “The genie is out of the bottle at the lower levels ... in Naval Aviation we went from a flying hour program budget in FY03 of 4.2 billion dollars to a flying hour program budget in FY07 of 3.2 billion dollars. At the same time, we produced more readiness, more reliable machines, and a better relationship with the fleet because they are getting what they need, doing



less work ... now you have internally something you can never take away from them.”

But what works for one group in the organization may not work for all groups. One Naval Aviation participant shared that the benefits weren’t as clear yet to the group he worked for: “Some people looked at AIRSpeed as an attack on their priorities ... [leadership] set this up as a good thing, but you just gave us more work.” What this example may illustrate is the need to work continually to articulate the benefits, for different groups, in terms that they find credible. One participant summed up: “When they begin to see some personal successes, within their own organization, then you start to get more buy-in.”

## Cultural Adaptations

When priorities change, the culture needs to change with it. That means that systems and norms need to reflect the new goals of the organization. Our participants outlined several key requirements in creating a change culture:

- Give them what they want
- Overcome resistance
- Be resourceful
- Accept change as a way of life

### Give them what they want

People are driven by causes and effects, and it’s important that the reward system be aligned with what the organization is trying to accomplish. There are numerous ways to creative incentives for employees, but our participants specifically noted money, public recognition, pride in work, and quality of life issues as key motivators.

#### Tailor rewards

“Change the reward system to reinforce changing the behavior.”

Time and time again, we see that people will do what they’re rewarded to do. Often, however, the system is still set up to reward past activities as opposed to new behaviors.

One example of this problem was shared by an executive in Engineering. He encountered some resistance in engineers to taking on new priorities: “The nature of the resistance comes

partly from the way we’re rated here: if you’re a release engineer for a fuel pump, then your entire job in life is to get the cheapest fuel pump out there that works in the car and doesn’t fail in the field. And that’s exactly what you’re rated on. Now, if somebody comes and says, ‘You know, we could make the car lighter if you used this other fuel pump,’ and if there’s any risk involved in that, there’s nothing in it for the engineer.” To address that resistance, the organization would have to align the rewards with the new, desired behaviors and priorities.

Another system barrier can be seen in the Navy, where an ingrained budgeting process doesn’t support current cost-saving initiatives. One participant explained the problem this way: “If you have stepped up to the plate as an Enterprise and said, ‘I project that we can live with 20% less three years from now than we did in the past.’ They say, ‘fine, thank you’ and take that money and use it for something else, as they should. But then, when you get to the year of execution, if they come back and whack you again, you have been hit twice. Whereas the people who are not so inspired to be in this journey may not have stepped up voluntarily and given up [money] in advance, so when the time comes they have been penalized less. So it is really an incentive *not* to play in the Enterprise regime.”

In our interviews, participants also identified another system challenge in the Navy; namely, the lack of alignment in recognizing the time that’s necessary to learn new ways of doing business and the promotion system. Part of the Navy’s change effort is to institute Lean Six Sigma (LSS) and encourage officers to become a LSS “Black Belt” and a Naval Aviation “Deployment Champion.” However, between the training they receive and their work to share their experience with others, the sailors are often absent from their core organizational structure for about two years. During the time they are gone, they are out of the promotion loop: “The challenge you have with any leadership development program is that they were gone out of their organization structure ... So, you have a problem of out-of-sight, out-of-mind, to some degree, as promotions come available.” This challenge, participants say, can be

a disincentive for sailors to embrace the change efforts through that level of participation.

There are numerous ways, however, to address the incentive challenges. In this particular case, one participant shared a specific solution for aligning promotions to the change objectives: “I would make sure that his fit reps (fitness reports) were based on the impact he had in that command towards readiness: ‘What have you done to make that activity better since you have been in there?’ That is how his promotions are going to be based.” Another participant believed that change-related behaviors shouldn’t only be rewarded, but required: “It is investing in the people ... making it a requirement to different promotion gates that these classes [to support the change] be done.” Active marketing can also be useful: “When a captain became an admiral, we made it a huge deal ... we make a story about that so we can demonstrate that people are getting promoted from doing this work.”

Regardless of the ways in which the rewards can be aligned with the new goals, it’s important to make system adjustments. Overcoming these system challenges takes time, but they can be addressed: “We’re starting to see it now, where the Black Belts who have been trained are going back into the workforce. And many of them are getting promotions.”

Besides aligning systems with rewards and incentives, it’s important that employees understand how measurable objectives are derived from abstract visions. One of the most fundamental issues in a system of rewards and incentives is how people are measured. As one participant put it, “The other piece of it is ... the metrics. How are you going to measure me? [Based on that], I will tell you how I will act.”

The manager has a key role in defining specific measures based on the larger organizational goals: “It’s really easy to say, ‘Okay. We’re going to fix quality.’ [But] the guy in the lab, he wouldn’t know how to do half of this stuff if he tried. So, the expectation is that the supervisor takes that

and says to the lab technician, ‘I need high-fidelity data from your test each and every day. And I want it on time. That’s what you do for quality.’” In this way, the employee understands his measurement criteria and, consequently, is more likely to achieve results.

Once rewards are aligned with new behaviors, and people understand the criteria for evaluation, then there are numerous ways to motivate them through rewards and incentives.

#### Use money when feasible

“To reinforce the change, you’ve got to change the compensation system.”

First, participants said, there’s no getting around the allure of money: “We’re all human

beings, and a lot of it comes down to ‘If I understand how I’m going to be compensated, how it’s going to hit my wallet, then it’s clear as to what’s going to be acceptable and what’s not.’” However, money incentives aren’t always crystal clear. Many respondents from the auto industry shared that

bonuses have not always been as closely tied to individual performance as they could have been. However, in a turnaround environment, the links between performance and compensation need to be more closely scrutinized: “Last year, we took a much, much more aggressive approach to reward those that were really getting it done. It was probably more performance-driven last year than we ever had before.”

Sometimes, even small financial recognition can go a long way to motivate people. Several auto companies have programs that allow periodic financial bonuses for a job well done: “We actually have a system whereby you can recognize someone and they get a credit card sent to their home. It could be like \$200, \$500, \$1,000, whatever.”

In the Navy, financial recognition is more difficult. However, there are some monetary rewards already in place. One Navy participant shared that one command “ended up winning the Stan Arthur award for logistics excellence, which

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*“You have to find out what the trigger is for people to understand what you are really trying to do.”*

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was a \$10,000 award that the command got, and they gave it to their MWR (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation) fund. They had a big picnic and everyone knew why they were doing it. That was a great success.”

Nonetheless, several participants said that money is far from the only way to motivate people. In fact, many pointed out its limitations as a primary incentive: “Most people leave an organization not because of the pay, but because they don’t like where they work, they don’t like their supervisor, they don’t like the culture, they don’t like the environment.”

In the Navy and elsewhere, recognition can have a big effect on how people respond to their environments.

#### **Provide public recognition**

“Award those people for when they have made a contribution to that overall good ... and make sure you do it in public.”

So, what makes for a motivational environment? In the Navy, it’s often various forms of public recognition. As one participant noted, “People recognize that by working in the government you’re not going to get rich. So sometimes, just some simple recognition ... can go a long way.”

This was certainly true according to our respondents from Naval Aviation. As one communications manager shared, “Those guys are motivated by just the knowledge and empowerment ... I just had to make sure that I got good news stories directly from them and that their team got the accolades and rewards that they wanted.”

Another senior manager echoed the effectiveness of this kind of recognition: “Our PAO (Public Affairs Officer) writes articles on activities that do really well and publishes them to the whole Naval Aviation Enterprise. They get their picture up on the website. Things like that are very important.”

Recognizing people in public also has a motivating effect on those who weren’t recognized, but want to be:

“So this division was getting a lot of good press and people would come to visit. So [others] would think, ‘we are doing good work too. Why aren’t we being showed off?’” What often happens, participants said, is that those striving for recognition go the extra step to demonstrate their

own results, activities that support the change effort.

Public recognition can come in a variety of ways, and one participant shared this story: “My two favorite colonels would go down to the work center and award that Corporal on the spot. The commander would walk down there right then, have the PAO take pictures, and put it up on their web site. That organization was just phenomenal. They had the best retention rate, even though they were overseas.”

Sometimes recognition can be less public, but still have an enormous impact. One Admiral in Naval Aviation gives special gold Navy coins to outstanding individuals on the shop floor, but does so in a handshake without calling attention to the gesture (see sidebar, page 11).

In addition to public recognition, people simply like knowing that they made things better.

#### **Encourage pride in work**

“Part of it [the motivation] is appealing to pride ... actually doing something for those that count on you.”

People spend an enormous amount of their lives at work, and participants said that pride can often be a strong incentive for behavior. One executive notes the strong connection people have with their place of work:

“Whenever you’re part of a successful organization, you feel good. A lot of our self-worth and identity is tied to the company.”

In the Navy, pride is indeed a motivator, as this story illustrates: “When they realized the results [of incorporating the changes], they got excited, they were proud. They would see that we had 06s to 09s [high ranking officers] walking through and wanting to see what was all the fuss going on ... They were the ones operating it, so they had something to feel proud about.”

That pride, participants say, also comes from serving the greater good: “What motivates people to stay in the Navy, and what motivates people to work, is they believe in the greater good. It is an honorable profession.”

Another incentive is to appeal to various aspects of their work and personal lives.



### Improve the quality of life

"It is a quality of life thing ... I don't have to work as many hours."

Another way to provide an incentive for new behaviors is through improving employees' quality of life. Prior to the changes in Naval Aviation, work was often chaotic, the hours were long, and tasks were unpredictable. The organizational changes brought an end to those things in many cases, and people noticed:

"We don't come in and work 14 hours a day anymore. We don't come in to work weekends. People come in when they are supposed to work."

*"People recognize that by working in the government you're not going to get rich. Sometimes, just some simple recognition ... can go a long way."*

They start when they need to work. They even have time for lunch. They go home when they are supposed to and they don't have to give up their weekends in order to get the job done. They are making a bigger contribution than they have ever made and yet their quality of life is better than it ever has been. That is incredibly powerful."

Participants shared other quality of life incentives for their work forces—revamped break areas with new furniture, new microwaves, and new refrigerators. According to participants, other workers were motivated by these improvements: "They saw some of the benefits that the [other] plants got ... and said, 'when are you going to do my work center?'"

Time off and flexible scheduling is also an important quality of life issue for many employees: "To our most junior folks, if you said, 'hey, this might get you more time off,' [they would say], 'Okay, I will do it.'"

One leader in Naval Aviation used schedule changes as a specific motivator for rewarding change behaviors and results: "I went to a four-day work week ... and a lot of them said 'I would

be willing to work four, 10-hour days to get Friday off to get a 3-day weekend.' I told every division that they could do that when they showed me what changes they made and ... how that would be more beneficial."

Even with rewards and incentives, organizations will still encounter resistance, and that resistance needs to be addressed one way or another.

### Overcome Resistance

"I've learned that you've just got to anticipate a certain amount of resistance. And you don't push back real hard on that resistance. You just let them say and feel what they want to say and feel. And then you start chiseling away at it one piece at a time."

Change and resistance go hand in hand, participants say, and you may need to draw on all your resources at some point to overcome it. At times you may need to fire people. But often you need to stick to the plan, demonstrate the benefits to employees, appeal to their self interest, and sometimes encourage people to break the rules.

### Replace personnel

One participant asserted that sometimes you simply have to replace the resisters with new people: "To be quite honest, to overcome resistance sometimes you just get to a point where you say, 'Well, some individuals aren't going to be swayed,' therefore, when we use the term going through change management, sometimes you've got to change the management. If they're not on board after a certain length of time, it's going to work against you, so you have to root out the naysayers."

### Persevere

Change doesn't happen immediately, one participant said, and it's important that leaders persevere: "The resistance to some extent is still there. That is why I really like to describe this as a journey ... there is just a series of steps that you have to take as opposed to assuming you have sawed off on something and you are done with it. If you don't keep paying attention to this stuff, the fundamental change does not occur. It's like a bungee cord. You stretch that sucker out and all

of a sudden you release it and ‘whoom!’ the place smacks back to.”

Part of that perseverance may simply be to go back to the urgency that motivated the change in the first place: “Well I think what you have to do is go back to stating the obvious, which is the reason why we’re making these changes to begin with. We have to change as a company. You always have to go back to that core premise in all of your communications, and when you do meet resistance you’ve probably got to stick to it even more.”

### **Demonstrate the benefits**

Some participants said that the best way to overcome resistance is to simply let the changes demonstrate the benefits:

“It was frustrating that I couldn’t help them see what I was seeing. And then, when it was finally on the floor, they saw it. They couldn’t see it until they actually, physically saw it working and the benefits of it. So, that was my turning point when I realized, it doesn’t really matter how much you talk to people, and how much you try to explain it—until they see the tangible result, you can’t really expect them to believe it.”

### **Appeal to self-interest**

In some cases, you can fight resistance by focusing on how the change efforts benefit the employee individually. One respondent overcame some resistance by focusing on the application of the new skills in the marketplace:

“They can Google Lean [Six Sigma] and see all these organizations that do Lean, and where you can get training, and that colleges give courses, and people said ‘Wow. I wonder if what I am getting from the Navy I can convert over.’ And it’s one thing to have a qualification or certification. It is another thing to actually be able to do it. Now if I get this training and I get this certification and I show skill with it, that may help me as I transition to another career.’ So I saw that. I said, ‘let’s get you trained. Let’s get you qualified. Understand it, live it, do it and then you can put that on your resume.’”

### **Encourage rule-breaking**

One leader in the auto industry worked hard to overcome rigid process-following because he saw it as barrier:

“People would say, ‘Oh, you can’t.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Well, the process is the process, you can’t violate it.’ And then at some point I’d say, ‘Well, who’s in charge here?’ ‘Well, you are.’ And I’d say, ‘Well, so, if I say I want it done a different way, why can’t I change the process?’ ‘Well, I guess we could, but we don’t do that that often.’ So, I developed these little pull-off stickers that that said, ‘Says Who?’ And I just wanted everyone to say, ‘Says who?’ whenever they’d hit a stumbling block and somebody says, ‘You can’t do that.’”

A big part of overcoming resistance is for the organization to draw on every resource available.

### **Be resourceful**

“There are tons of lessons learned ... that commitment needs to come from not only executive leadership, but has to be across the board in all realms.”

There are numerous resources within the organization and a robust change culture avails itself of all of them. Those that were most critical to our participants included fully engaging leadership and employees, encouraging employee ownership of their areas of responsibility, recognizing the power of bottom-up inspiration, providing necessary training, and using outside expertise when necessary.

### **Engage leadership**

“The highest echelon of the management ... all commanders of their departments, absolutely have to believe in [the change] and make it their number-one priority.”

Participants were clear that leadership engagement is critical to success: “Right off the bat, the one thing that has to be in place is leadership buy-in and commitment to making the change work.” One Navy officer put it succinctly: “If you don’t have that senior leadership support, nothing else is going to matter.”

So what does that support look like? In one case, it meant that leaders were physically present and engaged in the process:

“When I had an AIRSpeed in-brief or out-brief, [the Commander] was always there. No matter how busy she was, she always made time for that ... because she wanted everybody to

know that she was involved in [the change], and it was important to her.” This level of engagement, participants said, gives a clear message to the organization that the change effort is genuine.

Naval Aviation was very committed to exhibiting that level of commitment throughout the Enterprise, something they point to as contributing to their effectiveness: “One of the big signs [that] leaders are not engaged is when we go to a briefing, and [the leader] introduces the guy that is working for him that actually is going to do the talking. In Naval Aviation that doesn’t happen. If you want to find out what is going on in Naval Aviation, then the guy that you go to is the Commander ... and he is the one that does the talking. Top level leadership needs to be engaged as opposed to delegating.”

When asked specifically what has worked best for them, one Naval Aviation respondent said simply, “The things that have worked have been the activities where the leadership is strongly engaged.”

Other participants noted the importance of a committed leadership team, one that was clearly aligned on goals and mission: “It takes a commitment by all the leaders involved, from the top down to where I am. I’m the leader of the engineering charge, but we all have to be committed and focused on a common goal.”

In one auto organization, they learned that leadership unity was key: “the feedback we got from that meeting was ‘wow, for the first time we see a management team that doesn’t hate each other, is pretty aligned, and seems to get along.’” Another respondent added that “Leadership has to reach consensus and be committed to the change personally.”

### Engage Employees

“Involve as many people as you can. Get some champions in there that believe it’s the right thing to do and are absolutely committed to it.”

Leadership can’t create a change culture on their own—they need to engage employees in the effort. In one instance, a company solicited employee help in dealing with a major crisis: “What we did right was we engaged our employees ... it was one thing for me to take the questions from

the media, but our ability to heal was through our employees, who were being asked by their neighbors, their friends, and their church members [about the crisis]. So we equipped our employees with a lot of information. We wanted them to be ambassadors for the company and it actually worked.”

In many cases, your employees will be far more effective at bringing about change than those higher in the organization. Sometimes you need the credibility of your top performers to be

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*“The face of the organization is the first-line supervisor”*

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a champion for the change: “As soon as you get one of your number one technicians to buy into it, you’re done. If you can get him to understand the benefits, he’ll sell it to everybody else.”

Direct supervisors can also play a very important role. One respondent said she worked with lower-level supervisors “because they were the peer group that receivers are going to listen to ... I needed those work center supervisors. I’m talking about a senior petty officer ... who gets it.”

Frontline supervisors were also an important group in the auto industry, and respondents said that their influence could be very strong in the workforce: “You’ve got to communicate with the key influencers ... the face of the organization is the first-line supervisor, [and] it is absolutely critical to communicate to them because we have about a 12-to-1 ratio. That’s their span of control.”

Even your initial detractors can become your biggest influencers, participants said, if you can engage them: “On the first day the most vocal guy says, ‘I don’t believe this will work ... why are you making me do this?’ And when we left on that Friday he stood up and said, ‘When I came in here I was completely skeptical of this, but I saw the light on Wednesday, and I understood why you wanted so strongly to do this. I will be your

strongest supporter and I will back you.' Now, he's going to go back sell it to all of his subordinates. He's out of our research and engineering community, which is about 7,000-8,000 people. That's our largest competency here. If you can get the first flock of ducks to buy in, then the rest of them are usually going to follow."

#### Give ownership

"You get those key stakeholders to the table to sign up to things and they own it. But if they didn't sign up to it, they aren't going to push it."

Involving employees isn't enough, participants said, because they need to feel ownership to be compelled to act. As one respondent put it, "It was a matter of ownership, giving people the ability to own it. They really took responsibility for it and said, 'You asked us, we told you, and now it's ours and we own it.' When they took ownership, that changed the whole scope of everything, really. An unbelievable difference."

One executive saw ownership as key to his strategy of introducing change: "My approach was to get unvarnished input from the management team so that they could feel ownership of what we were starting to do. Secondly I wanted my immediate management team to feel ownership because they were going to be presenting it to their underlings. And the third thing I wanted to achieve was to start breaking the cycle of 'the management has all the answers and 'just do it don't ask any questions.'"

Many respondents shared specific examples of how employee ownership accomplished much more than management mandate. One senior manager said, "once the hourly people assume responsibility and take ownership of it, they have a lot more latitude in the unseen part than management does. They can make a lot of things happen."

In one instance, an auto company empowered employees to own a "crib" where equipment and supplies were located: "The Crib Champion ... a lot of [things] can be directly affected by them: they verify that everything is labeled correctly, check the general appearance, the condition of the equipment. When people get to say, 'That's mine,' they're going to take care of it."

## STORIES FROM THE TRENCHES

### Reaching younger audiences

How do you adapt communication to reach younger audiences? One challenge companies face is how to motivate younger employees to perform well, thrive in the organization, and stick around for the long haul. Several auto companies were taking this question very seriously and said that younger audiences want more input about how things are run. Why? One executive shared that their world is one of constant customization.

"They grew up in an era where they could have everything they wanted, exactly the way they wanted it, when they wanted it," he said. "Do you know how many different ways you can order a cup of coffee at Starbucks? A PhD on my staff went to the website, looked at all their options, and multiplied it out for me. There are 79,626,240 different ways to order a cup of coffee at Starbucks ... You can order your Dell computer online exactly the way you want it, and if you want a pair of Nike shoes with your name on them, you can do that."

Understanding young people's customizable world can help organizations understand how to communicate more effectively with them. Another auto executive added that younger employees definitely want a say in how the business is run. "They have different expectations about communication ... they want a dialogue ... [they say], 'Don't just tell me what I have to do, I want control.' They've got questions, and they want a feedback loop or they will shut you down."

The world today is different than it was for earlier generations—according to our respondents, to reach those who are the future of the organization, leaders at all levels need to adapt their communication practices accordingly.

### Work from the bottom up

"The change and the ideas really have to come from the bottom up."

Even with the vision coming from the top, our participants stressed that real change happens from the bottom up. Otherwise, you may just end up with lip service: "They are going to say they are committed because that is what their leadership wants to hear, but then they are not going to be very involved and just hope it goes away. The change and the ideas really have to come from the bottom up."

Another respondent added, "If you are going to change that process and you have a better process, you let them help develop it. That is the intuitive way."

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*"Let your people come to you  
with ideas, listen to them.  
Don't stifle them."*

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Getting that input from the ground up is crucial, but challenging: "The biggest challenge for us is really being able to tap the knowledge and experience that exists on the factory floor, start to get people working in small teams."

Nonetheless, that's what change environments demand. One leader clearly understood the need for this in his organization: "He was basically telling his directors and managers, 'Let your people come to you with ideas, listen to them. Don't stifle them.' And to the people, 'be empowered, you know what you're talking about ... come up with your best ideas, and let's get them out there.'"

Even though managers lead their subordinates, participants noted the importance of letting employees direct their own efforts toward the goal: "At no time did I say, 'this is exactly what we are going to do,'" one leader explained. "I may have guided them towards an area that we need to look at, but they needed to propose to me what they wanted to do. That was part of the buy-in, and it was truly our most junior folks who came

up with some of the ideas on how they wanted to change things."

One organization was particularly committed to bottom up input, so much so that at times it created some challenges: "We solicit input from everyone; even the people who are charged with janitorial duties are at some point asked to give input on things. It's almost democracy at work. Almost everything that happens here is consensus, it's not one person ... sometimes we want so much inclusion that there's an analysis paralysis kind of thing that takes place because we've got everyone weighing in. ... But if you can, you need to segue from inviting all these ideas, to deciding which one you're going to adopt and then executing it."

Regardless of those challenges, most participants agreed that bottom up input was critical to driving change. But even the most creative problem-solvers need training.

### Provide training

"I think the key for any of these [leadership] programs is the training ... oftentimes that gets overlooked."

With any new change program, the organization needs to acquire new skills, abilities, and ways of thinking. So, another resource that organizations need to draw on is training.

One Naval Aviation participant emphasized that training needed to happen throughout the organization: "I think the training is really important, and it isn't just for the admirals. They have to set an example. But it should be a requirement in everyone's fit rep (fitness report). You have to have these classes."

Another respondent echoed this advice, going even one step further: "If we are serious about Enterprise AIRSpeed and doing continuous process improvement throughout Naval Aviation, we have to make it part of training, part of our A schools (Apprentice schools) and C schools (Specialty schools). We need to get our aviation officers when they go through their officer training."

One auto industry executive shared that his company was particularly attentive to the needs of training: "That's one of the things I think [our company] does a good job at ... everything is very



well thought out, there are numerous training sessions to educate everyone about the program: Why are we doing it? What are the implications?" This kind of training, he said, ensures that everyone understands and can execute the new programs.

Clearly your inside resources are key to your change efforts. But participants also stressed the need for outside help.

#### Use outside perspectives

"You always need to have that outside perspective ... to understand what reality is."

Change is difficult, and sometimes an outside perspective can help: "I think in order to do this [change effort], you need a mentor. And the mentor needs to be someone external to you. It's along the old line of the doctor shouldn't try to heal himself. You need to have someone external to you that drives the behavior."

The core problem with insiders, participants say, is that it's tough to drive change with the same people who have always been there: "As long as they keep promoting from the inside, that culture will never change."

In the Navy, this may mean drawing on the help of civilians. One civilian leader believed that her non-military status was very beneficial: "I think the fact that I am a civilian helps a lot. There are so many of the people that we work with, contractors or military, but neither of those two groups can occupy the position that a civilian can. I can say things to the flags that the captains can't say to the flags, and yet the flags probably need to hear it."

That outside perspective may be particularly important in a communications role, in which someone has to consistently press leadership for greater clarity: "it takes a very unique person to sit in that position [and] I don't see that very often in the Navy. They have to be willing to dive in, and they can't be intimidated by the military structure. They have to be respectful, what comes with rank, but they have to feel empowered that their job is to translate commander's intent down to the change agents."

Even with outside expertise, however, one participant stressed the need to develop skills in house: "Use the experts to start that initial wave and then have your plan for when we don't need the experts. We need to have our own folks trained so we don't have to call on industry or someplace else."

#### Accept change as a way of life

"By the way ... the journey never ends."

The ultimate lesson in change management, our respondents said, is in understanding that change never ends: "A lot of people think that once you install something, then it is an end. The journey to Naval Aviation Enterprise is a journey that never ends. Even if you have everything under control, you are still going to do continuous process improvement."

One auto company executive also stressed continuous change in his organization: "The message we get across to people is that we're always going to be changing. There is no end-point because you're never going to get there. You're always going to be traveling." There are two key components, participants say, necessary to accept change as a way of life: having patience and celebrating along the way.

#### Be patient

"This is not going to be an overnight thing."

Patience is necessary, participants say, because change seldom happens quickly: "Even though it's been about a year, [the change] is still in the early days, because this is going to be a long turn-around."

Part of the reason that change is difficult in large organizations is simply because of the scope involved: "Like the Navy, we're a long-lead industry. If you decide you need to change to a different kind of a ship or battleship or airplane or whatever, or training for your folks, it doesn't happen tomorrow. You have to take time, and there's got to be the resource allocation to do that."

*"The journey never ends."*

Unfortunately, sometimes organizations are impatient for results to happen quickly: “Organizations need to be aware that there will be pressure to show results, and some sort of savings or benefit. But you have to understand your command and how long it will take to do that ... I am still seeing that with some of our new sites where we have recently implemented Enterprise Air Speed, and we just finished the training and implementation in December ... by March people were saying ‘well, where are the results?’”

Not only are expectations of quick results unrealistic, those expectations may encourage premature or faulty findings: “We can all come up with something to say where I have a savings somehow ... you can make data look and report just about anything that you want, and that isn’t what we want. We want true improvement.”

#### Celebrate and repeat successes

“Successes give credibility to what we’re trying to do on a broader scale.”

Change is constant, participants say, and organizations need to be focused on how to sustain changes and build on them. One of the ways to sustain change is to celebrate wins along the way, especially early on:

“In [a change] environment you have to celebrate every achievement, no matter how small, to break down the resistance.” Another participant said that “Part of it is developing some early wins. It’s very, very important to have some early wins because if you don’t have that, then it’s all just

terrible and difficult and hard.”

#### *Copy what works*

Another strategy for sustaining change in the long

term is learning from your successes: “There are golden opportunities to make an example. And once you have made an example that everybody else can see, it makes it that much easier to do it somewhere else.”

One goal that Naval Aviation has is to replicate what works: “Now that we are a little further down the road, we shouldn’t have to relearn everything from scratch. We should find a way to pick up a lesson and transport it to other places. So if we get the benefit of having just learned that

lesson, then we ought to document it. We ought to make it part of the guiding instruction. Let’s not keep relearning it each time the new master chief comes in and says ‘that isn’t how we did it at my last command.’ Let’s not do that anymore.”

## Conclusion

This study has examined communication practices associated with organizational change. We conducted this study to assist the Navy in benchmarking Enterprise-wide change management communication. We looked at the U.S. auto industry and Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE), and we identified three over-arching themes that comprise effective organizational communication: Leadership Qualities, Delivery Strategies and Cultural Adaptations.

Within each of these themes, our research uncovered successful practices and recommendations from experienced managers and leaders. Using the words of our interviewees, we have provided perspectives and examples of change-related communication as seen from various points in the organization.

The data we gathered from our interviews weaves a patterned tapestry of an interrelated strategy in which every thread plays an important role. Thus, while change leaders may see individual practices that they recognize in their own organizations, it is understanding and employing an entire change communication strategy, coalesced from the information presented here, that will make the greatest contribution to successful communication for organizational change.

How can the recipients use this report? First, the Navy could use the framework and information presented here to conduct a self-assessment of its own change management communication practices. A self-assessment tool could be developed from this report, and an analysis could be conducted by reviewing documents, conducting surveys, and interviewing participants. (The auto companies may find value in doing the same, using the information gleaned here from others in their industry and from the Navy.)

Second, the Navy could use this report as a guide to evaluate, revise and reconfigure its ap-

proach to a communications strategy for Navy Enterprise and Sea Enterprise.

Third, the Navy and the auto companies could continue the dialogue in two-way forums where each can explore best practices and learn from others who face similar management challenges.

Finally, the findings of this report have some general applicability for other public and private

sector organizations contemplating or undergoing large-scale organizational change. They could undertake similar studies, assessments, and strategies.

Academic researchers can use the results of this research to inform existing change communication theory, as well as develop communication models to expand and further explicate research in this area.

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## About the researchers

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# Appendix: Methods

## Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this research is drawn from *grounded theory*, a method in which theory is derived from the data rather than a particular theory being imposed prior to the analysis. The researcher begins with transcripts or field notes from interviews or ethnographic observation, and then analyzes the data to tease out themes, patterns, and categories within the responses.

As Jones puts it, “rather than forcing data within logico-deductively derived assumptions and categories, research should be used to generate grounded theory, which ‘fits’ and ‘works’ because it is derived from the concepts and categories used by social actors themselves to interpret and organize their worlds”<sup>2</sup>. This method was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 because they were interested in closely linking theory to the data from it was generated.<sup>3</sup>

In the interviews, we used Critical Incident Technique (CIT)<sup>4</sup>. CIT is a set of procedures used for collecting direct observations of human behavior that have critical significance for the participants. In short, CIT is used as an interview technique where the informants are encouraged to tell about organizational incidents (or tell stories) instead of answering direct questions about more general topics—for example, information about what was in their corporate communication plan. The idea behind this method is that an interviewee’s recollection of key events can provide a rich context for examining strengths and weakness of organizational performance.

We encouraged our respondents to share their experiences, which provided the data for drawing out key themes related to our research questions. In our study, we asked participants to reflect and share stories related both to efforts that were successful and unsuccessful in communicating during organizational change.

## Participants

Participants included executives (e.g., Vice Presidents, Admirals), and senior managers/

managers (e.g., Directors, Managers, Navy officers). There were 34 participants total, spread across Engineering, Manufacturing, Maintenance, Communications, and Corporate Executives. All participants were assured of their confidentiality in the study and were only identified in the report as an executive, senior manager, or manager (See Table 2).

## Procedures

In our study, we relied almost exclusively on qualitative, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted primarily at the interviewee’s office or conference room, but two of the interviews were conducted by phone because of military field responsibilities or schedule conflicts.

We audio-taped all the interviews and transcribed them for analysis purposes. We imported the transcripts into NVivo 2.0, qualitative research analysis software for managing data and generating themes.

First, the primary researcher read over all the transcripts to identify top-level, general themes. Following this first pass, there were three general themes identified:

1. Leader qualities
2. Delivery strategies
3. Cultural adjustments

Second, the primary researcher went through the transcripts again, assigning more specific codes to individual passages in the transcripts. Simultaneous with the second round of coding, the primary researcher organized the sub codes into one or more of the three primary themes, listed above.

Next, the primary researcher reviewed all the sub-themes and refined the categories, so that each sub-theme was unique to only one of the major themes. Finally, a second researcher reviewed the coded passages independently, identifying those that did not fit with the code that was assigned. The two researchers then discussed recoding those passages together, discarding those passages on which they could not reach consensus. The coded passages that were left became the basis for the research report.

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